

**Testimony to the Oregon House Education Committee re HB
3232 and HB 3233**

Dr. Rex Hagans

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Introduction

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Reardon, Vice-Chair Sprenger, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rex Hagans. I am a member of Oregon Save Our Schools, an entirely unpaid volunteer group of parents, grandparents, community members and teachers who are very concerned about the enormous risks that current educational reform brings to both our children's well being and that of the entire Oregon public education system. My 30 years of R&D experience with applying research to the improvement of our schools included a leadership role in designing and implementing the nation's largest federal investment in school change prior to the "Race To The Top," the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program of 1998. Based on that body of experience, I am here to urge you not to divert precious dollars into the proposed "strategic investments" in these two bills this biennium.

Many aspects of these bills are based on recommendations from the OEIB that have been developed with almost no public input and/or have not been well vetted by qualified experts. There has also been a strong tendency to confuse research with strongly held beliefs.

Oregon's Education Transformation Clearly Translates as Unproductive "Disruptive Innovation"

Underlying Oregon's current "education transformation" effort is a strong belief in something called 'Disruptive Innovation'. This is an approach that purposely creates major disruptions—even chaos—in organizations. It is seen by some as a necessary condition to achieve change. It has been mostly utilized by high tech business to try to enhance their competitive advantage. The technique is often described as a "Skunk works" operation. To make it work, the number of people having any connection with the project must be severely restricted. Access by outsiders to the project and its personnel must be strictly controlled. Then, once the insiders have all their ideas set in stone, they try to "market" them to others.

Soren Kaplan of The Ivey Business Journal in his article "Leading Disruptive Innovation" (July/August 2012) says: "*Perhaps the most defining characteristic of disruptive innovation is the great uncertainty that it creates for leaders, organizations, and entire industries.*" Is "uncertainty" really what our kids and their schools need more of right now?

The blueprint for Oregon's current education "transformation" began in the summer of 2011 with a few handpicked individuals and highly paid consultants in a private operation called "Learnworks." The "facilitator" of this group actually emailed a message to a colleague saying she was working on a "Skunkworks" project called "Leanworks" in Oregon.

Public input since then has also been severely limited. For example, the Governor's Education Funding Team's work throughout the last half of 2012 was absolutely closed to the public. When

the OEIB grudgingly held public forums around the state, the OEIB and Funding Team learned how absolutely “disruptive” these proposed strategic investments would be. 95% of the public who provided testimony demanded to know why our leaders were even thinking about these so-called “investments” when the curriculum was being narrowed, thousands of teachers were being cut and class sizes were skyrocketing. But the OEIB ignored this input and still decided to recommend the same “investments”!

Perhaps the Governor and OEIB should more carefully examine the data on the low success rate of so-called “disruptive innovation” in producing productive change in the private sector? A New Approach to Managing Disruptive Innovation in an Environment of High Uncertainty (innovationmanagement.se/2012/03/19/) has this to say: *“Innovation has been described as the way out of today’s difficult business environment. However, the rate of success of development projects, in particular white space and disruptive innovation projects, remains low.”*

Are we really willing to roll the dice with our kids future with such poor odds?

Oregon’s Education Transformation Ignores Research on Ways to Effectively Spread Best Practices.

HL Mencken said, “For every complex problem, there is a solution that is clear, simple - and wrong.” I truly believe that he was talking specifically about the transfer of best practice from one school to another. It seems to me that each new generation of Education Policy experts has to learn that lesson the hard way.

We do have meaningful research on what it takes to produce spread of improvements in education. It isn’t grounded in the “disruptive innovation” philosophy.

Michael Fullan, perhaps the most widely recognized international expert in system wide educational change tells us that “change savvy” leadership involves:

- Careful entry into the new setting
- Listening to and learning from those who have been there longer
- Engaging in fact finding and joint problem solving
- Carefully (rather than rashly) diagnosing the situation
- Forthrightly addressing people’s concerns
- Being enthusiastic, genuine and sincere about the change circumstances
- Obtaining buy-in for what needs fixing
- Developing a credible plan for making that fix

The disruptive “Skunk works” approach of the OEIB has not modeled respect for any of these conditions for “change savvy leadership”, let alone begun to establish a climate and a mindset that will support local schools in using them as we go forward. With staffing levels dangerously low, and teacher morale the same, I fear schools would struggle to start even solidly “rooted” and sound innovations such as Chalkboards CLASS project and the Mentor program for New Teachers. Frankly, we have lost too many educators to budget cuts. We very well may no longer have a critical mass of educators sufficient to implement effective innovations.

Higher Standards and More “Effective” Testing Make A “Shaky Sand” Foundation for Oregon’s Education Transformation Investments

These recommended strategic investments rest heavily on the assumption that the new Common Core State Standards for curriculum will drive everything and achieve major improvement—particularly if we do even more frequent student testing. Again, a peek at the

research by reputable experts reveals that this assumption is quite questionable.

Here is what a very recent (2012) study by the Brown Center on Education Policy (which is part of the prestigious Brookings Institution) had to say:

"Despite all the money and effort devoted to developing the Common Core State Standards— ,,,the study foresees little to no impact on student learning. "

The head of the prestigious National Center for Education and the Economy, Marc Tucker, says that relying on the development of tests to measure performance on the Standards is a big gamble:

"No country that is currently out-performing the United States is doing that or is even considering doing that, because they are deeply skeptical that computer-scored tests or examinations can adequately measure the acquisition of the skills and knowledge they are most interested in.....They are being imposed on the children of this nation despite the fact that no one has any idea how they will affect students, teachers, or schools. We are a nation of guinea pigs, almost all trying an unknown new program at the same time."

So, "disruptive innovation" as the process? Lack of attention to research on spreading improvement? A shaky sand foundation of common core standards and more faith in standardized testing to build on? If these don't give us pause for reflecting on the need to revisit these so called "strategic investments", I don't know what will.

Thank you.

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